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Protevangeliu[m] Jacobi

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INTRODUCTION

I. Purpose

This study is essentially a commentary on the Protevangelium Jacobi¹. The fact that the last commentary – a very concise one, moreover – was written in 1910 by E. Amann², while the editors of the text naturally had to restrict themselves to a few exegetical notes³, shows that there was ample justification to write a new commentary on P.J.

With regard to the text, the present author relies on the work of other scholars. It seemed preferable not to give the text as established in the last critical edition of P.J., i.e. the edition by E. de Strycker⁴. In order to enable the reader to discover the crucial passages

¹ The title *Protevangelium Jacobi* was first used by G. Postel (1510-1581), and has become customary since then. Origen cited it as *biblos Iakoobou* (see § 5 and note 62). In Papyrus Bodmer v there is a double title: *genesis Marias, apokalupsis Iakoob* (see also p. 168). The Greek MSS mostly give a very extensive title, e.g. *diègèsis kai historia Iakoobou, poos egennèthè hè huperagia theotokos eis hèmooon sootèrian* (manuscript 1454 of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), or: *tou hagiou Iakoobou tou adelphou theou logos historikos eis to genesion tès huperagias theotokou* (manuscript 1476 of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). Also in the versions the title is extensive (see O. Cullmann, in *Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, herausgegeben von W. Schneemelcher, Tübingen, 1959³, p. 278). Perhaps on account of the *Decretum Gelasianum*, which condemns P.J., manuscript 1454 is cited in the index of the MSS as “*anonymi narratio*”. In several other indices, also, the *Protevangelium Jacobi* is referred to as “*anonymi narratio*”. Henceforth *Protevangelium Jacobi* is cited as P.J.

² E. Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins*, Paris, 1910; henceforth to be cited as A.

³ cf. p. 192: sub B. Commentaries.

⁴ E. de Strycker, *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, Bruxelles, 1961, p. 34-35; henceforth to be cited as S.

of the text immediately⁵, it was decided to print two manuscripts side by side. The choice of these two was not hard to make. Naturally the oldest manuscript, which was published in 1958⁶, was to be included, while it seemed also quite logical to choose the manuscript which C. Tischendorf regarded as the best one⁷.

In order to write this word by word commentary the original Greek words referred to have been transcribed⁸. When a brief summary is given at the beginning of a chapter, the commentary proper is given after each individual word. Generally, each comment consists of the following parts:

1. In order to show P.J.'s indebtedness to the Old Testament in vocabulary and subjectmatter, we have given as many references to the Septuagint⁹ as seemed to be necessary.
2. To a lesser extent, the same applies to parallels adduced from the New Testament. One could call these two parts the experimental part of the commentary¹⁰.
3. Next, the readings of the other manuscripts are given. The manuscripts known before 1876 are referred to according to Tischendorf's designations¹¹, while for those published after that date we use the designations proposed by E. de Strycker⁴.
4. The commentaries of earlier commentators¹² are referred to.
5. Parallels from other religions also are offered where possible and desirable.
6. Later Apocryphal writings¹³ treating the same material are adduced to illustrate the further development of the story.
7. In conclusion, the author's own opinion is given.

⁵ cf. § 2.

⁶ *Papyrus Bodmer V, Nativité de Marie*, publié par M. Testuz, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cologny-Genève, 1958.

⁷ C. Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, Leipzig, 1876, p. xviii, in reference to ms. Paris, Reg., nunc Nation., num. 1454; henceforth to be cited as c.

⁸ The following transcription has been used: α a; β b; γ g; δ d; ε e; ζ dz; η è; θ th; ι i; κ k; λ l; μ m; ν n; ξ x; ο o; π p; ρ r; σ s; τ t; υ u; φ ph; χ ch; ψ ps; ω oo; ' h.

⁹ Henceforth to be cited as LXX; cf. § 4.

¹⁰ More about this problem is to be found in § 3 of the introduction.

¹¹ C. Tischendorf, o.c., p. xvii-xx.

¹² cf. p. 191-192.

¹³ e.g. *De nativitate Mariae* and *Pseudo-Mattheus*, ed. E. Amann, o.c.

2. Survey of the editions of the Greek text of P.J.

The first Greek text of P.J. was published in 1563 by M. Neander in Basle; it was preceded by the Latin version of G. Postel, published by Th. Bibliander in 1552. The manuscript on which this edition was based, can no longer be determined¹⁴.

A new edition of the Greek text did not appear till 1703. In his *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* J. A. Fabricius¹⁵ gave the Greek text of M. Neander, printed beside the Latin translation of G. Postel. During a century and a half, no interest was taken in the form of the text, though the theory of G. Postel that P.J. was the missing beginning of St. Mark's Gospel, was much discussed at that time¹⁶. The Greek text of J. A. Fabricius is at once an end and a beginning. It is the last edition to be satisfied with only the text of M. Neander, while it is at the same time the first to be provided with alternative readings from other manuscripts.

In his edition of 1804¹⁷ A. Birch uses the text of J. A. Fabricius as basis, while supplying variants from two manuscripts from the Vatican. A. Birch is the first to give a text-critical edition. This edition was followed fairly soon by that of J. C. Thilo¹⁸. The latter no longer bases his work on the text of J. A. Fabricius, as A. Birch did, but takes one ms. from the Royal Library of Paris as his text, which he provides with a text-critical apparatus. The manuscript (Cod. Catal. 1454, the same as used in the present commentary: c) dates from the tenth century and is, in his opinion, the best ms. available: "Huius antiquissimi et praestantissimi codicis textum integrum nos loco vulgati proposuimus".¹⁹ Seven Parisian manuscripts and the two from the Vatican, already consulted by Birch, form the critical apparatus.

¹⁴ cf. J. C. Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Leipzig, 1832, p. 49. W. J. Bouwsma, in his biography of Postel (cf. *Concordia Mundi: The Career and thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)*, Cambridge Mass., 1957, p. 36) doesn't discuss this problem either.

¹⁵ J. A. Fabricius, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Hamburg, 1703, 1719².

¹⁶ cf. A., o.c., p. 166-167.

¹⁷ A. Birch, *Auctuarium Codicis Apocryphi Novi Testamenti Fabriciani*, Copenhagen, 1804.

¹⁸ J. C. Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Leipzig, 1832.

¹⁹ cf. J. C. Thilo, o.c., p. 53.

In his edition of 1853 C. Tischendorf composed a new text from the mss he could consult. The result may be called a "composite text". In this respect he differs completely from all his predecessors. In the prolegomena of his *Evangelia Apocrypha* (p. 9) Tischendorf says of the P.J.: "In his maximam curam impendimus Pseudo-Jacobi libello. Praeter codices enim Thilonis quattuor, Birchii duos, item Fabricianum, et Postelli textum, ut Pseudo-Eustathium aliosque praeterea adhibuimus octo codicis a Thilone nondum adhibitos. Neque vero satis visum est ex his codicibus unum prae ceteris repraesentare, sed primi operam dedimus ut textum conformaremus ad optimorum codicum consensum".

The number of available mss had not increased for Tischendorf's editio altera in 1876. Since the end of the last century however some ancient fragments have been published, which are of particular interest in discussing the unity of P.J.

These fragments are given in:

1. B.P.Grenfell, *An Alexandrian erotic fragment and other Greek papyri, chiefly ptolemaic*, Oxford, 1896²⁰.
2. E.Pistelli, *Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei Papiri greci e latini in Egitto, Papiri Greci e Latini I*, Firenze 1912²⁰.
3. H.Schöne, *Palimpsestblätter des Protevangeliums Jacobi in Cesena*, Leipzig, 1928²⁰.

In 1958 M.Testuz published an important ms. of P.J. which belongs to the well-known Papyri Bodmer²¹. This publication derives its importance from the fact that Papyrus Bodmer v is the oldest ms. of P.J. we know. It was, most likely, written in the 3rd century A.D., while the earliest-known mss so far dated from the 9th century at the earliest, the only exception just mentioned being the few fragments²⁰ which go back to an earlier date also. So we have chosen this Papyrus Bodmer v²² as one of the two texts for this commentary, this oldest ms. naturally being very important for our knowledge of the earliest form of the text. In 1961 E.de Strycker, S.J., published *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*.⁴ In this work the author confronts Pap. Bodmer v

²⁰ Bibliography, p.192.

²¹ cf. note 6.

²² Henceforth to be cited as z.

with the material gathered by Tischendorf in his *editio altera*, augmented with the fragments published since then. The author does not use the about one hundred mss which are to be found in many different libraries dispersed over many different countries²³.

Those were studied by B.L.Daniels²⁴, who collected all the mss which were available to him and composed a text from them. In this respect he followed and completed the method of Tischendorf. Unfortunately this work only exists in a few stencilled copies, and was not available, so that it must be left out of consideration.

The above survey shows, that in the course of time two methods were used in examining the text of P.J.; Thilo represents one method, Tischendorf the other. In the following paragraph the advantages and disadvantages of these methods will be examined.

3. The editing of the text

As this study does not intend to give a critical edition of the text, the present author made a choice from the two methods used so far in editing the text of P.J. Thilo could have made a composite text, because several mss were available to him. His choice was perhaps determined by the small number of manuscripts available to him, yet he seems to have chosen on principle to take a single ms. and provide it with variants from the others.

The choice of Tischendorf also seems to have been a matter of principle. The method he was to follow for the text of the N.T., he used already here.

At present the choice of method is determined in the first place by the great number of manuscripts that has emerged. Daniels follows the method of Tischendorf and goes to work in the same way. It is a good method, only in this case it is to be regretted that the results are not available to everyone.

De Strycker, in his edition, considers it possible to put together the earliest text on the basis of a comparison of Pap. Bodmer v with the whole of the traditional text known to us (i.e. the *editio altera* of Tischendorf augmented with the fragments published since then).

²³ cf. S, o.c., p.19.

²⁴ Dissertation of Duke University, Durham, N.C., U.S.A., where the author was a student of Professor K.W.Clark.

This means that s. did not look into the rest of the material. That is the great objection to his procedure. In order to reconstruct the earliest text it is necessary to examine all the extant manuscripts²⁵ and impermissible to leave some eighty manuscripts out of account. The results S. has achieved may be termed very good, but it is not "la forme la plus ancienne" of the text, at least the method he uses arouses some doubt about this.

As it was not possible to compare all the manuscripts²⁶ for the present commentary, and the text of Daniels was not available, the other possibility was chosen²⁷. Adapting Thilo's way of editing consisting of giving one ms. accompanied by the variants of the other mss, we give here two mss by way of practical compromise²⁸. These two texts have been set side by side. The earliest text known²¹ is confronted with the manuscript⁷ which both Thilo and Tischendorf consider a very good copy. These texts will be referred to as z²² and c⁷. Variants of Tischendorf's edition of the text⁷ accompanied by those from mss which were published¹⁹ after 1876 are given in the commentary²⁶.

Apart from the practical arguments, already mentioned, there is also a fundamental consideration, which makes it necessary to follow this procedure. In copying the text of the apocrypha a very great liberty seems to have prevailed.

They were not "sacred scripture". This greater liberty results in a great many "embellishments"²⁹. Without a particular ulterior motive, prompted rather by the playfulness of their fancy, the various copyists have added to the tale or shortened it, while harmonizing various versions according to their own personal

²⁵ cf. P. Maas, *Textkritik*, Leipzig, 1957³, p. 15.

²⁶ About one hundred, cf. S., o.c., p. 19. It was impossible to examine all of them for this commentary. Moreover it is superfluous to repeat the work of B. L. Daniels.

²⁷ cf. p. 1-2.

²⁸ As J. H. Ropes printed the text of the Codex Vaticanus next to that of the Codex Bezae, cf. F. J. Foulkes Jackson/Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. III, *The Text of Acts*, by J. H. Ropes, London, 1926, p. 240.

²⁹ This freedom even applied to the first phase of the development of the text of Acts, as J. H. Ropes remarks (o.c., p. 204): "In this phase, the text was subject to free variation, both accidental and deliberate, and to elaborate rewriting."

predilection³⁰. The pious copyists would provide an old text with details which agreed with their monastic piety³¹. Because of all this, it is very hard to reconstruct the original text. P.J. might be best described as a *historia psychoophelès*, the main characteristic of this category of stories being the fact that edification is more important than correct tradition³². It is much more important, therefore, to compare various stages of the development of the tale than to look for an original text³³.

It is not possible to afford proof that the text of z is to be preferred to that of c. It is also practically impossible to construct a descending series ending in the autographon. This becomes evident if one compares two texts and registers all the differences. z is not to be preferred to c, nor vice-versa, but it is better to print them side by side. The simplest form is by no means always the earliest one. In the last chapters the text of z is decidedly an abridgment compared with the form we find in c. S. has convincingly shown, that in this case the text of z is not to be preferred³⁴. One might also call the later apocryphal writing *De Nativitate Mariae*¹³ an abridgment of P.J., in which the translator has taken all kinds of liberties.

The original form of the text is also hard to determine because, like all the apocrypha, P.J. has a homiletic character. The text has been transmitted very freely. In the MSS P.J. is often found among homilies of the fathers of the church. P.J. also is found in lectionaries used in monasteries³⁵.

Finally attention may be drawn to the haggadic Character³⁶ of P.J.

³⁰ cf. L. Vagany, *L'Evangile de Pierre*, Paris, 1930², p. 121.

³¹ cf. M. J. Lagrange, *Un nouvel Evangile de l'Enfance*, édité par M. R. James, *Revue Biblique*, 37, 1928, p. 547.

³² cf. S. J. Warren, *De Grieks-Christelijke roman Barlaam en Joasaf*, Rotterdam, 1899, p. 4.

³³ As A. F. J. Klijn remarks correctly in his preface to his edition of the *Acta Thomae* (cf. A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. v, Leiden, 1962, p. vii.)

³⁴ cf. S., o.c., p. 377-389.

³⁵ cf. M. J. Kispagh, o.p., *The Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple*, Washington, 1941, p. 133. Also, P. Saintyves, *De la Nature des Evangiles Apocryphes et de leur valeur hagiographique*, *Revue de l'histoire des Religions*, 106, 1932, p. 452.

³⁶ cf. F. Kattenbusch, *Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu als Haggada der Urchristologie*, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 102, 1930, p. 470.